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Great Smoky Mountains News Release

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Park Announces Lottery System for Distribution of Firefly Parking Passes

Great Smoky Mountains National Park officials announced that parking passes for shuttle transportation to view the synchronous fireflies at Elkmont will be distributed this year via a lottery system. Since 2006, access to the Elkmont area has been limited to shuttle-service during the eight days of predicted peak activity in order to reduce traffic congestion and provide a safe viewing experience for visitors that minimizes disturbance to these unique fireflies during the critical two-week mating period.

Previously, all visitors wishing to view the synchronous fireflies at Elkmont applied for a parking pass for the shuttle operation through a first-come, first serve online reservation process administered by www.recreation.gov. In recent years, the demand for parking passes has far exceeded the number of passes available. Passes have sold out within seconds after the inventory has been made available for reservations, frustrating both online users and phone users.

“Last year, we had so many people log in online, almost simultaneously, to attempt to reserve a parking pass for the firefly event that the online system and phone system were maxed out,” said Superintendent Cassius Cash. “I quickly learned that trying to reserve a parking pass was like trying to get a ticket to a popular rock concert! Unfortunately, we can’t accommodate all those who want to come see the fireflies at Elkmont, but we are hopeful that the new process for registering to reserve a parking pass will be an easier, less frustrating experience for visitors.”

The lottery system provides an equitable and more convenient opportunity for interested persons to register for a parking pass. Applicants may apply at any time during the three-day open period. All entries, regardless of time of application, will be submitted for the lottery drawing. Results of the lottery will be determined on May 10. The lottery system is used for other popular National Park Service events such as the annual White House Easter Egg Roll and the use of the Half Dome Cable system in Yosemite National Park.

Dates for the 8-day shuttle operating period will be announced on Tuesday, April 26. The lottery will be open for applications from Friday, April 29 at 12:00 p.m. until Monday, May 2 at 8:00 p.m. Results of the lottery will be available on Tuesday, May 10. A total of 1,800 vehicle passes will be available for the event which includes: 1768 regular-parking passes (225 per day) which admit one passenger vehicle up to 19' in length with a maximum of six occupants, 32 large-vehicle parking passes (four per day) which admit one large vehicle (RV, mini-bus, etc) from 19' to 30' in length, with a maximum of 24 occupants. Lottery applicants must apply for either a regular-parking pass or large-vehicle parking pass and then may choose two possible dates to attend the event over the eight-day viewing period.

The lottery system uses a randomized computer drawing to select applications. There is no fee to enter the lottery this year. If selected, the lottery winner will be charged a \$1.50 reservation fee and awarded a parking pass. The parking pass permits visitors to park at Sugarlands Visitor Center and allows occupants access to the shuttle service to Elkmont.

Parking passes are non-refundable, non-transferable, and good only for the date issued. There is a limit of one lottery application per household per season. All lottery applicants will be notified by e-mail on May 10 that they were "successful" and awarded a parking pass or "unsuccessful" and not able to secure a parking pass.

The number of passes issued each day is based primarily on the Sugarlands Visitor Center parking lot capacity and the ability to accommodate a large number of viewers on site. Arrival times will be assigned in order to relieve traffic congestion in the parking lot and also for boarding the shuttles, which are provided in partnership with the City of Gatlinburg. The shuttle service is the only transportation mode for visitor access during this period, except

for registered campers staying at the Elkmont Campground. Visitors are not allowed to walk the Elkmont entrance road due to safety concerns.

Visitors may visit the website www.recreation.gov and search for “Firefly Event” for more information and to enter the lottery. Parking passes may also be obtained by calling 1-877-444-6777, but park officials encourage the use of the online process. The \$1.50 reservation fee covers the cost of awarding the passes.

For more information about the synchronous fireflies, please visit the park website at <http://www.nps.gov/grsm/learn/nature/fireflies.htm>.

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